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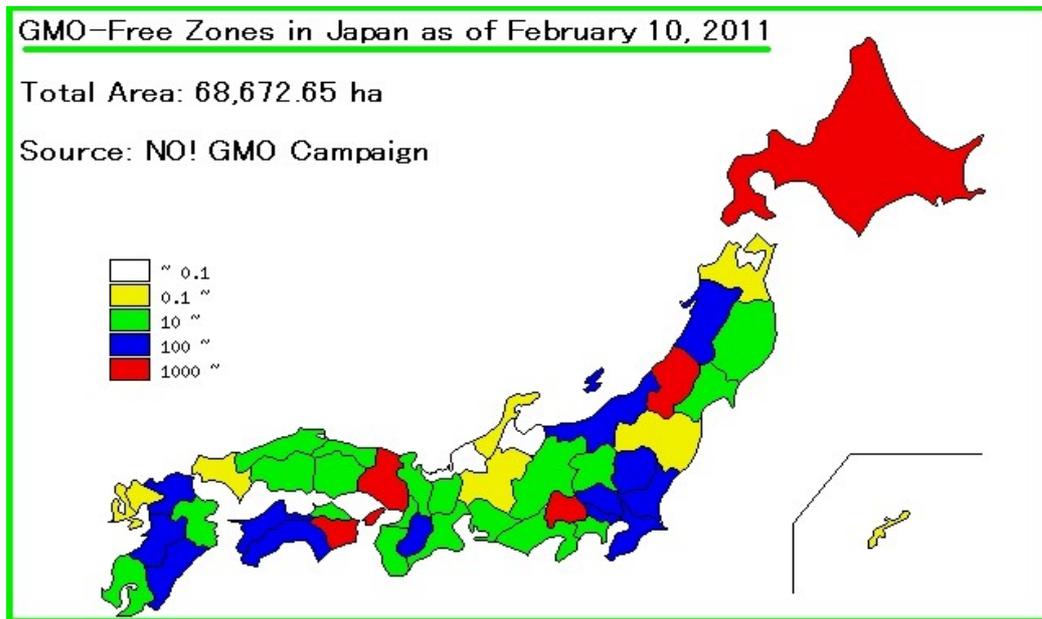
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GMO Free Zone Registration Status Report (2011)

The No! GMO Campaign held its sixth annual nationwide GMO Free Zone conference in Tokushima Prefecture on February 26, 2011. About 450 farmers and consumers gathered from all over Japan.

During the meeting discussions were held about a wide range of topics, including the results and future tasks related to the COP10/MOP5 conference in Nagoya in October, 2010. Also, lectures explained the fundamental risks that genetically modified organism pose as well as issues related to biological diversity on a regional level. Video messages from abroad were shown, with experts including Benny Haerlin, coordinator of the Save Our Seed initiative from Germany, and Australian farmer Steve Marsh. A message from Clare Westwood of Pesticide Action Network Asia-Pacific (PANAP) was shared with everyone assembled.



The trend in Japan is that the total area of GMO Free Zones are expanding. The total registered area now stands at 68672.65 hectares as of February 10, 2011. This is an increase by 13136.73 hectares compared to the previous year (February 28, 2010). Over the past year, new GMO Free Zones have been registered in 21 prefectures out of Japan's 43 prefectures, as well as in administrative areas such as Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hokkaido. Only two

prefectures in the entire country do not have any GMO Free Zones, compared to four last year. In total, the combined area is about 1.5% of the cultivated farmland in Japan.

“We pledge to continue to work for expanding the GMO Free Zones in Japan while exchanging information with colleagues and supporters around the world,” says Koketsu Michiyo from Consumers Union of Japan.

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Organic Farming in Japan: Lessons for the World

Report from IFOAM Organic World Congress

I had the opportunity to participate together with organic farmers and activists from Japan during the IFOAM Organic World Congress held in South Korea in September, 2011. It was the first time the global federation of organic associations held such a large meeting in Asia. Here we will briefly summarize some of the main lessons from Japan as they are relevant to consumers, farmers, and everyone around the world.



Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) was founded in 1971 and has pioneered so-called Teikei systems, meaning close links between a farmer and a group of consumers. It is similar to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) but Teikei creates stronger connections that also allow the farmers to support the community and the consumers. During the IFOAM conference, Kubota Hiroko, Hayashi Shigenori, and Wakashima Reiko explained Teikei in detail. The workshops were lively with discussion and many questions from the participants from around the world.

Kubota Hiroko explained that most of Japan's Teikei farmers have selected to not get the JAS (Japan Agricultural Standard) Organic Certification: “This JAS standard is enforced by the Japanese government and it is operated by third-party organic certification bodies in Japan as well as certification bodies abroad,

including well-known European and American bodies. There is a strong sense that local Teikei groups do not need to be certified by such certification systems, especially by third-party accreditation bodies.”

Kubota noted: “Teikei activities provide many opportunities for farmers and consumers to meet together including farm visits, meetings, and so on. In Japan, Teikei is based on the principle of mutual cooperation of farmers and consumers, with the basic idea that everyone involved will be able to share a deep understanding about the farming methods.”

IFOAM has recently defined Participatory Guarantee Systems as “locally focused quality assurance systems.” This applies especially to farmers who sell their produce at farmers markets, regional natural shops and sometimes regional supermarkets, etc. The aim is to find novel ways to certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders, built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.

Kubota explained that this is indeed identical to the Teikei system that has been developed in Japan: “Under the JAS organic certification system, the labeling of ‘organic’ is strictly ruled. We cannot use any ‘organic’ words or labels except by getting the JAS certification. From the viewpoint of JOAA, we would like to use the word ‘organic’ in a more friendly way, and through a more simple method. We are currently attempting to make models of applying PGS in Japan, with reference to the IFOAM definition.”

Saving seeds

Hayashi Shigenori was especially invited to the pre-conference on seeds held before the main IFOAM meeting in rural South Korea, about 3 hours from Seoul. He is a farmer in Chiba prefecture just east of Tokyo. He explained: “Japan Organic Agriculture Association held its first seed exchange among seed saving organic farmers in the Kanto region in 1982. Most of them are old farms. In 1995 JOAA’s Seed Group was established and has begun the freeze-preservation of seeds with collecting several data about seeds. In 2002 the Seed Network was founded in JOAA and has been promoting seed saving activities by regular events such as seed exchange and seminars.”

Hayashi is particularly concerned about F1 seed and hybrid varieties, as well as genetically modified organisms (GMO): “Hybrid varieties are bred by crossing varieties with different traits using Mendel’s Law that dominant traits are expressed in the first generation (F1), but the second generation (F2) on will have mixed traits expressed. Thus, they cannot be used in commercial production where uniformity is expected. It can be said that hybrid seeds were created so that high profit is secured for the seed companies. They are also expensive for the farmer. Seeds are fundamental for farming and it is not good if farmers are dependent on commercial companies for their seeds.”

Self-sufficiency is what is valued in organic agriculture, according to Hayashi: “It is important to find and foster the varieties kept for generations in different regions in order to be self-sufficient by saving such seeds rather than being swayed by economic efficiency that made many varieties disappear as they were abandoned and scrapped.”

During the pre-conference, a heated debate was held on the need for organic plant breeding, public breeding initiatives, and other efforts to conserve and develop biological diversity on organic farms. Several participants also spoke out strongly against global trade rules under the World Trade Organization and other Free Trade Agreements (FTA) that oblige countries to restrict seed saving. In particular, draconian rules regarding intellectual property rights are making it almost impossible for farmers in some parts of the world to freely share seeds with each other. In fact, Japan has resisted such international pressure and saving and exchanging landrace varieties is still allowed.

Consumers Enjoy Safe Food

Wakashima Reiko made an appeal as a Teikei consumer, noting that “in Teikei, since food is not a commodity, consumers have taken the view of having an opportunity to share some of the surplus from a producer that is basically self-sufficient. Since self-sufficiency is a basic premise, the producer becomes a multi-item producer who inevitably grows small quantities of a large number of crops. This is very effective in terms of risk aversion to deal with weather conditions or insects. In the case of a single crop, a big economic loss will be the result at the time of a bad harvest. Also, lots of chemical pesticides may be used. However, in small-quantity multi-item production, such worries do not exist. The farmer does not experience heavy losses, although a large profit is not made. A stable way of life becomes possible.”

Wakashima is a consumer who belongs to a Teikei group to support and enjoy safe food: “We started this Teikei 38 years ago with farmers in Miyoshi village in Chiba prefecture. We have 26 participating farmers who own small-scale family farms of around 1.2 ha each. In this particular Teikei, we are about 800 consumers living in Tokyo and the urban areas around the capital. A producer sends vegetables to a consumer collection point directly once every week. In all, we have 116 such places where the producer and the consumer can meet face to face every week.”

However, the March 11, 2011 earthquake and nuclear accident in Fukushima prefecture, where her parents live, has been a huge tragedy for many people. Wakashima explained: “Due to the nuclear disaster, there was an evacuation advisory. The people who were evacuated from their land were in tears. In the surrounding area, people had to make up their own minds, and there were many people who did not take refuge. My parents belong to this group. They are people who were born on the land, who grew up eating what they harvested on the land, who got married on the land, who bore and brought up children, and who have always lived on the land. Finally, soon they will return to the soil of the land, in order for new life to be born once more.”

Wakashima noted: “This nuclear disaster has separated that which is indivisible. Nuclear power and human beings cannot live together at all. That has now been abundantly clarified.” Her advice to people is to eat healthy foods, such as brown rice, fermented food such as miso soup, soy sauce, pickles and natto. This diet was introduced in 1945 by medical doctors in Hiroshima to evacuate the radioactive Cesium from our body. Wakashima also advised everyone to appreciate the real value of food, reminding us to “eat foods with thankfulness toward nature, respectfulness toward farmers, mindfulness toward all creations.”

It was encouraging to listen to these three speakers and learn from their experiences. As consumers, we share a huge responsibility for many of the problems facing the planet. We need to consider all the options for changing our bad habits and make efforts to overcome the current troubles.

By Martin J. Frid, Consumers Union of Japan

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Consumers Against TPP Negotiations

November 2, 2011

The TPP negotiations seem to be hi-jacked by American rice growers and large grain exporting corporations. This is in spite of the fact that liberalization of the rice sector would have devastating effects on rural Japan. We cannot understand why the Japanese government should allow one small group of American producers to effectively make it impossible for Japan as a whole to maintain its food sovereignty. Consumers Union of Japan strongly rejects such approach to trade liberalization, and we, the consumers, have concluded that we have every reason to oppose the TPP negotiations. We think this will create a world where the law of the jungle prevails.

Half a year ago, American soldiers came to Tohoku to help the people there recover from the massive earthquake and tsunami. This was called "Operation Tomodachi" and while the word "tomodachi" means "friend" it seems the US Trade Representative represents the "enemy" of the same farmers and fishermen in rural Japan that appreciated the support for Tohoku!

Farming is the backbone of all activities in rural areas, from Okinawa in the south to Hokkaido in the north. Most rice farmers grow rice in the summer and wheat in winter. Both crops would be competing with cheap imports if tariffs are eliminated through "Operation Enemy." Also, Japanese farmers are properly covered by health insurance and pension systems. This cannot be compared to areas in the United States with a large influx of illegal immigrants that work for large landowners at minimum wage conditions.

To abruptly engage in TPP negotiations is not acceptable for consumers. TPP is not only going to harm Japan's agricultural sector, but ruin the entire economy in rural areas. This also leads to destruction of the natural environment and food safety concerns. In particular, Consumers Union of Japan is concerned about pressure to change the rules to combat BSE and the mandatory labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMO).

Structural reform of agriculture, allowing large-scale corporations to run farms, will be the end of small-scale farming. Such policies are now promoted by the Democratic Party of Japan, in spite of their 2009 election manifest, in which they promised to attach special importance to farmers. Instead, small-scale farming

should be seen as the model for others around the world to follow, as it requires less reliance on fossil fuels and promotes biological diversity.

We cannot help but ask if it really is the intention of a small lobby group, the US rice farmers, to cause such terrible distress to millions of people in rural Japan.

By Yamaura Yasuaki, Consumers Union of Japan

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Genetically Modified Papaya: Consumer Reaction

By Yamaura Yasuaki, Consumers Union of Japan

The safety assessment of the genetically modified papaya was completed by the Food Safety Committee in 2009. In April, 2011 there was a deliberation about its labeling in the Consumer Committee of the Consumers Affairs Agency. There has also been an opportunity for the general public to comment on the case. Following this, a deliberation was held on July 27, 2011 to decide about the way such GM papaya should be labeled. This GM papaya could be the first case of marketing of a transgenic fruit in Japan.

The Consumers Affairs Agency suggests that based on the Food Sanitation Law, the manufacturer should attach a printed label on each fruit. The text "Genetically Modified" should also be added to the ingredient list on papaya jam, papaya juice and other processed foods, together with the country of origin.

CUJ is concerned what will happen if the seal (sticker) is accidentally removed or falls off.

First of all, we regard the cultivation and import of GM papaya as problematic. Japanese consumers who do not want to eat GM foods expect the GM label to be distinct and clear if GM papaya is to appear on the market. CUJ would like to point out the following problems with the approach taken by the Consumer Affairs Agency:

According to the suggestions, "The sticker could possibly be re-attached on the fruit, when the operator in charge deals with GM papaya only", if the GM sticker is removed or falls off. If the manufacturer handles both GM papaya and non-GM papaya, all products from that manufacturer should be labeled as "may contain GM papaya" due to the possibility that mixing appears.

The Consumer Affairs Agency recognizes that there may be cases when the GM papaya is sold without a label because it has been removed or falls off, but takes a relaxed attitude to this possibility. This should be regarded as a serious violation.

CUJ regards the act of selling GM papaya without correct GM labeling as a violation that should be severely punished by the law.

The Consumers Affairs Agency decided to reflect such points that were pointed out at the Food Labeling Committee meeting regarding the labeling rules.

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BSE: Keep Strict Rules To Eradicate Mad Cow Disease

December 9, 2011

Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) decided on December 9, 2011 to consider reexamining the legal measures against Mad Cow Disease and to ask the BSE committee of the Food Safety Commission to deal with the issue by the end of the year.

We regard the easing of the present BSE inspection standards to have only one purpose, namely to make it possible to resume beef imports from the United States.

Food Safety Citizens' Watch and Consumers Union of Japan have sent the following letter of protest on December 9, 2011, demanding that the Japanese government should withdraw its reexamination plans and instead continue to protect consumers against BSE.

Protest Letter: Withdraw Plans to Reexamine Japan's Strict BSE Measures!

On October 31, 2011, Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) raised the issue of reexamining the countermeasures against BSE, and submitted this request to the Food Safety Commission on December 9, 2011.

We regard this as a politically motivated decision that only serves to accept expanded imports of beef products from the United States. We find this to be premature and strongly urge the Japanese government to withdraw its reexamination process, for the following reasons:

1) Japan introduced countermeasures against BSE in 2001, implementing a strict system to safeguard against this terrible disease.

Japan's domestic system includes the testing of all cattle and a traceability system that identifies each cow, as well as the removal of Specified Risk Material (SRM) after slaughter, in addition to feed regulation. This is a system that serves as a global model for countermeasures against BSE and its importance has not been diminished.

However, during the time of the reelection campaign of president George W. Bush in 2005, Japan agreed to change its strict rules so that beef products from cattle aged 20 months or younger could be imported from the US based on a simplified BSE countermeasure system. This concession followed intense US pressure on Japan's government.

Even so, careful testing of each and every cow has continued domestically here

in Japan in order to protect consumers.

2) As part of the proposed new countermeasures against BSE, the age limit will be raised to 30 months, and it will thus become unnecessary to test any cows that are younger than 30 months. However, there is no scientific basis for changing the age limit for BSE inspection from 20 months to 30 months.

In fact, we regard this as a purely political decision as Japan attempts to join the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade negotiations. It is simply a concession to US domestic standards that has set the age limit arbitrarily at 30 months for its own cattle testing program. It would mean that 90% of US beef products, rather than 20% today, will become eligible for export to Japan.

Japan made this concession to remove what trade negotiators call a “non-tariff barrier” to US president Obama as he tries to get reelected for a second term, and needs the support of and contribution for his electoral campaign from the powerful US beef industry. This also helped Japan get the US to accept that it would be allowed to participate in the TPP negotiations.

3) While BSE infection rates have decreased around the world, there is no evidence that the US system to combat the disease has had any such effect.

Moreover, questions have still not been answered regarding the spreading of the disease, the cause of development of symptoms of BSE, and the issue of prions inside the bodies of cows.

In order to completely eradicate BSE from the world, it is indispensable that research based on Japan’s system that tests all cows should be implemented in all countries, and that data collection should be further expanded.

Since there have been 15 confirmed cases of US beef product export program violations with regards to Japan, it is also necessary to strictly verify the US compliance with countermeasures against BSE.

4) We are concerned that if non-tariff barriers are further deliberated in the TPP negotiation process, we will end up with a similar situation that South Korea is now facing as part of its free trade agreement with the US. This system explicitly makes it impossible for a country to stop imports of beef products from a country even if BSE should occur in the exporting country (This is also known as the “ratchet effect” and implies that any new liberalization measures would be “locked in” so they cannot be rescinded or nullified over time, for example by improved consumer protection legislation). Such deregulation is unacceptable to consumers in Japan.

Additionally, we are strongly opposed to having the rules and standards of OIE (Office International des Epizooties) as mandatory provisions that override Japan’s food safety measures that are based on the precautionary principle. We regard this as a serious and unacceptable affront to Japan’s sovereignty.

Food Safety Citizen’s Watch

Kamiyama Michiko

Consumers Union of Japan

Amagasa Keisuke, Koga Masako, Mashimo Toshi & Yamaura Yasuaki

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Don't forget the people who survived the tsunami in Tohoku

Small efforts can have a large effect to assist the people who survived the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. I was able to visit small towns in rural Miyagi prefecture. Already, 3 months had passed since the catastrophe hit the coastal areas. The roads are cleared but the devastation is still a reality. It will take a long time to clear up all the debris and remove garbage safely. Many people lost their lives, and even more are still struggling. Do not forget that their plight is still ongoing.

We drove in 4 vans from Hanno-shi in Saitama-ken, leaving around 1AM, arriving at the first hinan-jo around 8AM. The vans were packed with boxes of donated clothes and food. We also used donations to purchase rubber boots. Thick blue sheets are also much in demand, to protect tile roofs that have been damaged in the earthquake. This group of volunteers have been visiting the area several times, and we always call before arriving. We take notes to better be able to provide individuals with specific needs. For example, ladies undergarments are much needed, as well as soft pants. In general, it is best to donate new clothes rather than used items. All items should be carefully folded and not just thrown in large plastic bags. Removing the price tags is also appreciated.

Children in the area were delighted to be able to select among hundreds of books, especially picture books and manga. We also brought candy which obviously was very popular. It is impossible to imagine what these kids have been through, but their smiles and laughter made me want to participate in this type of action again and again. The unfathomable damage is not just physical but also psychological, with many school classes having missing pupils.

On another weekend, this team brought a hair salon worker, who provided free haircuts. For many people, this was a delightful opportunity to feel a little bit of luxury. Although bank services and convenience stores are slowly opening in the area, we were told that regular shopping is difficult, with distances up to 40 km to the nearest regular shop with ordinary services. Yet, I was also struck by the amazing beauty of this region, with the ocean looking so beautiful. I could understand why many people want to stay and continue live in this part of the country.

By Martin J. Frid, Consumers Union of Japan

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Japan Resources is published by Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ). CUJ was founded in April 1969 and was officially certified as a non-profit organization on May 1, 2006 by the new Japanese NPO legislation. We continue to be a non-political and financially independent organization (NGO). CUJ is funded by membership fees and donations. The main concern of CUJ and its members is to realize a world of liberty and equality, a world free of economic, social and legal discrimination, and to preserve a safe and healthy environment for our children's future.

CUJ pursues the following goals on behalf of consumers: (1) To secure for ourselves and our families safe and healthy lives, (2) to establish systems/laws to protect the rights of consumers, (3) to promote peace, social justice and economic fairness, (4) to support and empower consumers who care about the environment, and (5) to cooperate with foreign consumer groups/organizations.

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